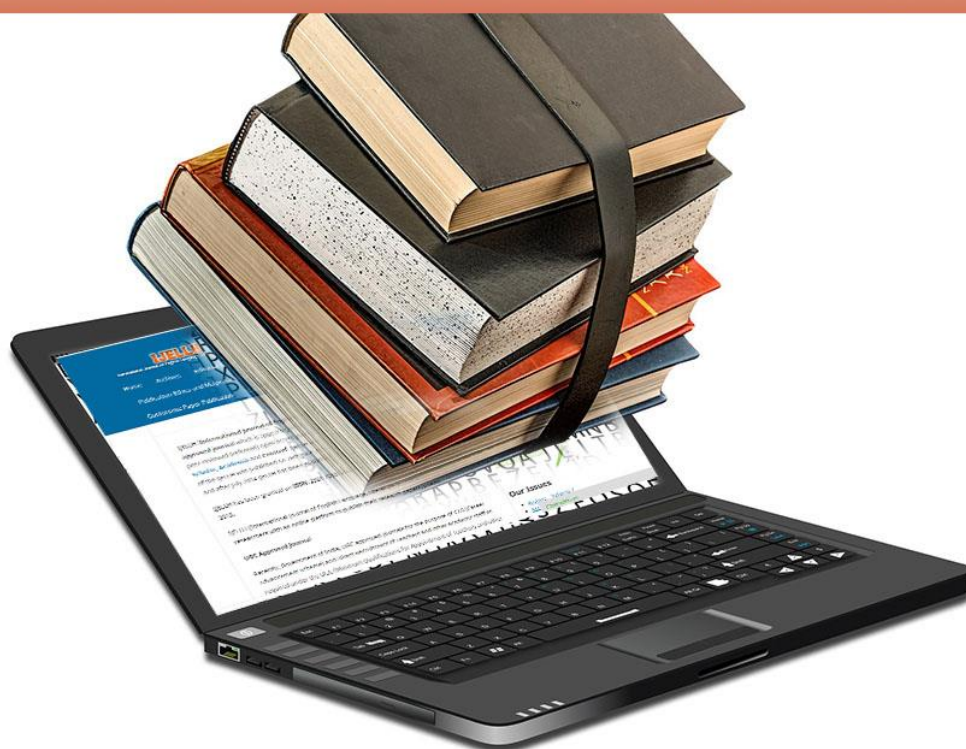


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Cultural Conflicts in Maud Diver's *Lilamani* And

Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*

Abstract

This paper aims to address the cultural conflicts in Maud Diver's *Lilamani* and Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*. Culture plays a significant role in the formation of a person's identity. Culture is defined as values, attitudes, norms and customs of a society or group of people shared by them. Cultural differences occur when two or more cultures disagree about their beliefs or ways of life. People are separated and treated differently based on their culture. Writers like Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Raja Rao, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Kiran Desai etc. represented the cultural differences rightly.

Key Words: Culture, Identity crisis, Conflicts, cultural differences, East and West,

Introduction

Katherine Helen Maud Diver, an English woman born in India in 1867, was a well-known prolific writer of India. She wrote about thirty novels and non-fiction works dealing primarily with Indian themes and historical figures. *Far to Seek: A Romance of England and India* is the second novel in a series that began with *Lilamani: A Study in Possibilities* (1911) and continued with *Far to Seek*.

Kiran Desai, a promising Indian writer in English was born in India in 1971 is the daughter of the eminent novelist, Anita Desai. She was educated in India, England and the United States. Her debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, published in 1998 was unanimously acclaimed throughout the world. Kiran Desai's second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* was published in 2006 won her the Man Booker Prize in 2006.

Cultural Conflicts :

Both the novels *Lilamani* and *Inheritance of Loss* deals with the theme of East – West conflict. In the novel, *Lilamani* the characters depicts the cultural differences between the East and the West. There are some instances in the novel *Lilamani* which illustrate this. The protagonist, Lilamani undergoes the cultural differences when she goes to England after her marriage with Nevil Sinclair. *Lilamani* explores the conflicts and problems that a mixed race marriage that takes place in England. The problems include opposition from English in-laws, racial prejudices of society, at the thought of mixed race offspring and so on. It also shows the conflict between colonizer and colonized relationship depicting Britain as the dominant partner and India as a submissive one. The values, attitudes, culture and traditions are clearly revealed through the characters of both the races.

Nevil's family, his father, his sister Jane Rosoe stands against their marriage. She is shocked at the disgrace to the family. Jane's voice echoes the racist's views of English woman in Raj novels. The racial hierarchies between white and brown men are portrayed

through the figures of Nevil Sinclair and Sir Lakshman Singh, Lilamani's father. Lilamani's father, a supporter of the Empire, recognizes the superiority of the British culture. But his white son-in-law at first was not able to accept India even though he married an Indian. And Lilamani being a Hindu, belonging to a Rajput clan worships her husband as God. She goes to Church along with her husband and chooses to read the Gospel of St. John and St. Paul's dissertations on wifely submission and womanly modesty

Lilamani proves her citizenship as English, just as she naturally and inevitably converts to Christianity, she also acknowledges and acts to conserve the aristocratic values of property and ownership, title and blood that her husband represents. She helps her husband in all his endeavours and awakens his talent to great heights. And as Nevil Sinclair doesn't accept India in the beginning, her support and devoted worship makes Nevil famous in his world of paintings and raise him to a level at which he believes and accepts India for Lilamani.

The conflict between the two cultures the East and West is also very clearly seen in Nayantara Sahgal's novel, *A Time to be Happy*. The protagonist of the novel Sanad Shivpal is son of a rich man. He is a product of a public school, an executive in a mercantile firm. In short he is a stereo type of a particular class. Most of his problems are the problems of the West-educated boy returning to India and encountering himself between two sets of value. Sanad's main concern is to regain his roots to belong to India. Most of his troubles originate from his upbringing in an anglicized atmosphere. He feels a sense of alienation and rootlessness which is clearly expressed while he is talking to his friend McIvor:

.....It is a strange feeling to be midway between
two worlds, not completely belonging to either. I
don't belong entirely to India. I can't. My
education my upbringing and my sense of values

have all combined to make me un-Indian. What do?

I have in common with most of my countrymen. (*A Time to be Happy*, p -113)

Towards the end of the novel Sanad decides to efface his anglicised background and strives towards greater involvement with the people of India. He attains his goal by coming close to people and by marrying the unsophisticated, non-westernized daughter of a college lecturer.

Inheritance of Loss also has the cultural conflicts dealing with the theme of East and West encounter. When one talks of East – West conflict in Indo - Anglian novel, the name of Raja Rao comes uppermost in our mind. Of all the Indo - Anglian novelist, it is Raja Rao who deserves greater consideration in terms of this tension theme. The problem of tension is the problem of every such man who feels inclined towards west because of its glamour, fashion, affluence and individual liberty. But soon after he is disillusioned and comes to the conclusion that he belongs to the Eastern culture and cannot adjust himself fully in the Western culture. Only such type of feeling is presented through the character of those Indo - Anglian novelists who deal with the East – West conflict in their novels. An Indian educated abroad is confronted with the problem of adjustment in India on his returning home. He strongly feels the suffering between the two cultures and analyses his personality. The novel *Inheritance of Loss* is set between Kalimpong and New York City. Kiran Desai exhibits the feelings of the characters who are caught between two cultures – Eastern and Western.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Jemubhai Patel lives a life of isolation who could neither fit into the cultures of his origin because of his desire to imitate the English colonial identity nor could he get the Western identity. His convent educated granddaughter, Sai, is his true heir and she is a misfit in both the East and the West and life at Kalimpoong fills her with the fear of being left. Her parents belong to different religions: Parsi father and Hindu mother. She learned in a convent that cake was better than laddo, fork spoon knife better than hands,

sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi. Her romance with Gyan, her tutor, flourishes against the unstable political background of Kalimpong. Both are Indian but from different castes and culturally very different. Sai is representative of Western culture. She speaks English, eats English food, and celebrates English festivals. On the contrary, Gyan, a Nepali, eats more indigenous food and speaks a different language. The colonial condition chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, moulded their respective characters.

Another character Nimi Patel also faces the problems of cultural predicaments. She however begins to protest against the callous attitude of Jemubhai. The hatred needs to be understood as a result of the cultural conflicts. He never speaks and looks at her. She was uncared for. Her freedom is useless and her husband disregarded his duty. He calls her lazy, wide as a buffalo. These physical and mental tortures make her invalid. She begins falling asleep during day and wakes up in the middle of the night. Jemubhai's tortures create dislike to see her in the mirror because she could not see herself in it. Because of the psychological attack of Jemubhai, her cheeks are erupted. He considers her fallen beauty as a further affront. He is scared of touching her due to her skin disease. This is how the novelist makes Jemubhai misogynist and degrading selfish animal. She stays in her sister's house in which she burns herself to death while cooking.

The relationship between Sai and the cook is another cultural conflict. Sai spends plenty of time with the cook but both of them are aware of the fact that their social status is different. After the incident in Cho Oyu, the cook's hut is ransacked by the police. Sai witnesses thoughtless attitude of police towards the cook. The cook is a poor man without any dignity. He even agrees with the approach of the police. "Well, they have to search everything. Naturally. How are they to know that I am innocent? Most of the time it is the

servant that steals'''. (*Inheritance of Loss*, p-12). The point of this conflict is to highlight the social differences in India. One would say that Desai's aim is to describe the reality in relationships among people. All of them play certain roles in the society in order to cover the hypocrisy and the truth that only by superiority over the others they are able to identify themselves. The cook, grudgingly works for the judge waits to be liberated by his son, Biju, who, he believes will make it big in America. However, Biju fails to become a successful immigrant worker in U.S For Biju America is a world of frustration and hopelessness.

Their lives are intertwined with that of Gyan, a Nepali tutor, whose love for modernity draws him towards Sai. Gyan joins the rebellion, the Nepali revolution which effects Sai. She becomes the symbol of all that against which he fought and their relationship fall apart. Gyan thinks why he hates Sai and comes to know the facts about her. Though a product of a free India, Sai still gazes upon the colonizer and hence fails to achieve a total liberation. Gyan is of the opinion that only ones own tradition and culture could shape one's personality.

The characters Noni and Lola obsessively cling to Western culture, partly due to Lola's daughter Pixie, who works for the BBC. It is very important for them to draw the lines properly between the classes. They treat people according to their social status and class. They criticise the religions as they believe that no religion and no government could stop the crime happening in India. Lola and Mrs. Sen participate in intense battles over which country, England and America is superior. Instead of identifying themselves with their Indian culture these women take on Western identities. In the case of Lola there is conscious attempt to choose the West and systematically cancel or negate the non-west. They were unanimous in the opinion that they didn't like English writers writing about India.

Thus this aspect of cultural identity is also represented in *The Inheritance of Loss* through all the characters who struggle between two cultures i.e. East and West. The novel

thus speaks about such divergent people, centred in the cross cultural whirl of identities. Desai has effectively represented cultural differences in *The Inheritance of Loss* through the characters of the novel. The feeling of inferiority complex grasped them and we find them dwelling between the cultures. The Judge deliberately refuses his Indian identity but despite of all his efforts he can never belong to the West. On the contrary, Biju recognises that he can never belong to the Western culture and he comes back to India. Cultural differences between Sai and Gyan resulted in departure of lovers. All the characters in the novel, major and minor are victims of cultural differences.

Balachandra Rajan also dealt with the theme of cultural conflict in the novel *The Dark Dancer*. The hero of the novel after spending ten years in England returns to India. He faces the problem of adjustment and alienation in the country of his birth. The protagonist Krishna is representative of intercultural tension which is a common characteristic of Indo- Anglian fiction. Krishna's alienation is apparent from the very beginning. After two years in Cambridge when he comes back to India he feels that he coming back to an indifferent sky or an anonymous teeming of house. The East-West dilemma crops up again in the novel when he has to choose between British liberal Cynthia and Kamala, the idealized Indian women but ultimately it is the East that wins.

The idea of essential femininity of the East is endorsed in the novel *Lilamani* by Lilamani's father Sir Lakhsman, an enthusiastic Anglophile imperialist. Audrey tells him, "If modern India produced more of his type, 'we would hear little or nothing of political unrest', (*Lilamani* p- 37) - who is keen to support the marriage if it will promote yet greater sympathy between Britain and India. From an idealistic point of view, he explains, "it seems as if such combination ought to produce a fine result: if only because soul of the West is masculine and soul of the East, feminine' (*Lilamani*, p-118).

Audrey Hammond in *Lilamani* is a missionary of modernity and is disappointed that Lilamani will not become a doctor and bring her medical skills home to improve the lot of Indian women. During a conversation between Audrey and Lilamani, Audrey talks about the culture in the West and the relation between the wife and husband in the West.

The characters of Uncle Potty and Father Booty represent the privileged people from the West living in India. Even though their economy is fading, they are still able to maintain their status and position as wealthy compared to the poor Indian born people in Kalimpong. Compared to the masses of poor Indians they are still rich and powerful. Having bought his land from the judge years ago, Uncle Potty now spends the rest of his family fortune on liquor. Father Booty is from Switzerland and keeps a dairy. He and Uncle Potty are best friends and spend their evenings drinking together. Like everyone else, Father Booty also suffers when the GNLFF takes control. Having lived in India for forty-five years, he is suddenly found to lack a valid residence permit, and suddenly he is categorized as an illegal immigrant. At this stage it is interesting to compare Father Booty's situation with that of Biju, who also lives in a foreign country on illegal terms. Their immigrant experiences are strikingly different. Whereas Father Booty has been able to live a privileged life in India participating in society, Biju has lived a secret life in poverty and humiliation.

Conclusion

The novels *Lilamani* and *The Inheritance of Loss* illustrate the cultural conflicts which are common in both the novels. The characters struggle to identify themselves between two different cultures i.e. East-West. They neither belong to their own country nor to the alien land and have a sense of realization at the end. Maud Diver and Kiran Desai have vividly presented the striking similarities through their characters.

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